



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Office of Marine Safety

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Place: National Park Service, Everglades City, Florida

Person Interviewed: Susan Reece

Interview Conducted By: Jim Walsh
Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

INTERVIEW

Susan has worked as a member of the Park Service interpretive staff for about a year and a half. One of her duties as an interpreter is to ride the concession boats and deliver a talk on the Park's wildlife and natural history. The interpretive staff does not go out on each and every boat tour, however, the staff does make an effort to ride at least one boat a day. The tours last approximately an hour and a half with a fifteen to thirty minute break in between tours. The boats make either four or five runs a day. The *Manatee II* does a sunset cruise. Manatee II's COI allows her to operate outside the confines of the Park including the Gulf of Mexico.

In addition to the concessionaire's regularly scheduled boat tours the Park Service sponsors schools and camps. The sponsored tours may have as many as 120 children per boat excursion. There are no special provisions made for the children with regard to life jackets. The Interpreters are required to take and be certified in Water Safety prior to guiding the large groups. It has been her observation that the boats go out in all kinds of weather including lightening storms.

“(During the winters the park had formal educational trips to an island across the bay. The concessionaire transported the 30 kids plus 5 adults & a ranger in one of the Panther boats to and from Sandfly Island. And, yes, there were no provisions made for the children in regard to life jackets. The boat used was usually one being run for the regularly scheduled public tours -- the concessionaire would "squeeze" the trip in during the 30 minutes turn-around time between tours. Only those interpreters who had taken the water safety course could do these particular trips. I was told by my supervisor that this was a Collier County Schools rule and did not necessarily apply to other school districts. When we had other school groups visit, they could be 100+ in numbers. Those schools would usually make arrangements with the concessionaire and then call us and

ask for an interpretive ranger to be on board. This ranger did not have to have water safety instruction. Again, as far I know, there were no provisions made for the children in regard to life jackets. These tours were usually a mix of school group and public.

The boats when out in all kinds of weather - including lightening storms - no matter the type of passengers on board.)”

The typical safety brief by the boat captain is telling the passengers over the PA where the lifejackets are, that the boat has fire extinguishers and the boats don't travel in deep water. The brief is usually given as the boat is leaving the dock. On the *Manatee II* the PA system cannot be heard in the lower deck area over the sound of the diesel.

“The PA system has been fixed is working now.”

The boats can have as many as thirty to forty foreign paxs on a trip during high season - Jan through April. A typical pax count will include several children – approx five to six and four or five senior citizens. There are people with disabilities that go on the tours; the boat and office staff usually ends up lifting them to place them in the boats.

Over the past year and a half Susan has observed the office takes the head counts and tells the captain how many people he should have. The office also gives the captains the go ahead to leave for the trip. Boat captains take head counts to see if they have what the office tells them and will call the office if the counts don't match.

On occasion I have seen the captains leave without calling in the number but only after the office has given them the go ahead to leave. The permission to go is usually given by a hand signal or a shout from the office staff. When the counts are given by the office a hundred digit is added to the count to confuse any competitor that might be listening to Ch 78. Ch 78 is the working channel for the boats.

“ The office radios the captain and tells the captain how many passengers he should have and to "roll" (go). On the small boats (panthers) the captain checks his receipts and/or counts the passengers. If the numbers match the office count, he leaves (he usually does not call back to the office except when the count was hard to hear over the radio). If they don't match, he calls back and says he's missing so-many. The office will then use their PA and announce that the boat is ready to depart/please board. When the captain has had more than what the office tells him, he does not call it in. I've seen them count again and shake their heads and go with the extra people (who may or may not have paid).

On the larger boats (Manatee I & Manatee II), when the count comes over the radio, the captain checks with the mate(s) to see if the counts match. Then they roll. On one occasion the mate didn't know how many people were on board and we went without confirming the count (this happened the day the Panther One sank. I was on the Manatee I).

When the office calls the count to the captain, the office adds 100 to the count. When a boat radio is not working, someone from the office comes out and yells and tells the captain to go with a wave.”

The boats have broken down in the past, last winter the *Manatee II* went for months on one propeller. She (*Manatee II*) hit the *Manatee I* when coming into the dock during that time. The *Manatee I* had her back end all pushed in.

According to Ms. Reece, Captain Maye is one of the best boat captains when it comes to giving the safety brief. He works well with all of the Park staff and has always been good with the paxs. When the boats break down the captain's radio the office and a new boat comes out for the paxs.

“One more thing - I told this to Bob (I think that's who it was) a few days after talking with you. Last winter, while I was preparing to do the narrating for the tour, I was asked to be one of the mates on the boat because the 2nd mate was running an errand. The boat (*Manatee II*) was supposed to leave at 2:30 but the captain refused to go without 2 mates. Sammy Hamilton kept telling him over the radio to roll. And the captain kept radioing back that he was short a mate. Finally, the captain asked me if I would be the mate because Sammy was going to make him go. I told him that I would if he told me what to do. Sammy was walking around the marina toward the boat. The captain left the boat and met Sammy. They talked. The captain came back and said that I was the mate. I didn't do anything as a 'mate'. The other mate did it all. The boat left 15 minutes late because of all this. “

END OF INTERVIEW

Jim Walsh